

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

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NODIS

FOR DR BRZEZINSKI ONLY

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM TEL AVIV DTD 09 JUL 1977

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NODIS

PASS WHITE HOUSE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, IS, US

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S VIEWS ON LEBANON

1. DURING OUR MEETING JULY 8, PRIME MINISTER BEGIN BROUGHT UP LEBANON AND WENT INTO THE SUBJECT AT CONSIDERABLE LENGTH. HE HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN REVIEWING THE BACKGROUND BOTH OF OUR POSITION AND OF THE PREVIOUS ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AND BEHAVIOR. HE SPOKE QUIETLY BUT FIRMLY AND WAS CLEARLY WELL INFORMED.

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2. THE PRIME MINISTER ASKED ME TO ASSURE PRESIDENT CARTER THAT ISRAEL DOES NOT WANT ANY LEBANESE TERRITORY. MOREOVER, HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES IN THE CONVERSATION THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT TAKE US BY SURPRISE. IF WHAT HE TERMED "CONTINGENCY EVENTS OR DIFFICULTIES" AROSE, HE PROMISED TO CONSULT WITH US, TO ASK OUR ADVICE AND TO SPEAK WITH US AS FRIENDS BEFORE TAKING ANY

DECISIONS. HE SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD WE SUPPORTED PRESIDENT SARKIS AND THAT WE SUPPORTED THE SYRIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON. ISRAEL ALSO SUPPORTS SARKIS BUT THE SYRIAN PRESENCE IS ANOTHER MATTER.

3.I SAID THAT I WAS VERY PLEASED TO HAVE HIS ASSURANCE ABOUT "SURPRISES." IT WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE APPROACH TAKEN BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT. I NOTED THAT WE HAVE DIPLOMATIC ASSETS WHICH COULD HELP IN CASE DIFFICULTIES AROSE, AND THAT WE THOUGHT IT WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN AN OPEN AND FRANK CONSULTATION.. I ADDED THAT I THOUGHT IT VERY DESIRABLE FOR HIM TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE,IF THE PRESIDENT DID NOT DO SO, TO DISCUSS IN DETAIL THE LEBANESE SITUATION DURING HIS WASHINGTON VISIT.BOTH OUR ADMINISTRATIONS WERE NEW. IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT FOR US TO HAVE AN AUTHORITATIVE APPRECIATION OF WHAT EACH OF US IS DOING AND WHAT ARE EACH COUNTRY'S OBJECTIVES.

4. BEGIN WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT THE LEBANESE BORDER IS NOW A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS PROLONGATION OF ISRAEL'S DEFENSE PERIMETER. THE SYRIANS IN LEBANON, POSSESSING SOVIET ARTILLERY, COULD ALREADY FOR THE FIRST TIME THREATEN TO KNOCK OUT THE OIL REFINERIES AROUND HAIFA, AND IMPORTANT STRATEGIC TARGET. HE RECALLED THAT LEBANON HAD NOT INTERFERED IN THE 1956, 1967 OR 1973
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WARS.IF THE SYRIANS WERE TO PUSH FURTHER TOWARDS ISRAEL'S NORTHERN BORDER AND OCCUPY IT--AND THIS APPEARS TO BE LEFT TO THE ARABS TO DECIDE--THIS WOULD THEN CONSTITUTE, FROM ISRAEL'S VIEWPOINT, A PROLONGATION OF BORDERS HOSTILE TO ISRAEL.

5. BEGIN THEN ANALYZED THE HISTORY OF THE SYRIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON. HE RECALLED THAT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY SYRIA HAD BEEN THE CENTER OF PAN-ARAB NATIONALISM.ASAD WANTED TO MAKE DAMASCUS AGAIN THE CENTER OF ARAB NATIONALISM. IN ADDITION, HIS DREAM OF A GREATER SYRIA INCLUDES LEBANON AND AT LEAST PART OF PALESTINE. AS FAR AS ISRAEL IS CONCERNED, ASAD HAS NO RIGHT TO BE IN LEBANON.

6. BEGINCONTINUED THAT ISRAEL'S MAIN PREOCCUPATION WAS THE SURVIVAL OF THE CHRISTIAN MINORITY IN LEBANON. HE ASSURED ME AGAIN THAT HE WOULD NOT TAKE US BY SURPRISE. HE THEN WENT ON AT LENGTH TO DESCRIBE ISRAEL'S COMMITMENT TO DO ALL IN ITS POWER TO PRESERVE NON-MUSLEM MINORITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. HE

RECALLED THAT ISRAEL, TOGETHER WITH IRAN AND THE U.S.,
HAD EXTENDED MILITARY SUPPORT TO THE UJRDS OF IRAQ.
THEIR FATE WAS A GREAT TRAGEDY. ISRAEL NOW WAS
EXTENDING, AND WILL CONTINUE TO EXTEND, HELP TO
THE CHRISTIAN MINORITY IN LEBANON. KISSINGER,
HE RECALLED, HAD TOLD RABIN THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT
HEAR ANY RESERVATIONS FROM THE U.S. ABOUT THIS
SUPPORT.

7. I TOLD BEGIN THAT WE WERE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT
THE SITUATION IN LEBANON. SARKIS WAS IN A REMARKABLY
UNHAPPY SITUATION. HE WAS JUST BEGINNING TO REASSEMBLE
HIS ARMY AND TO TRY TO BUILD A CREDIBLE PEACEKEEPING
FORCE. WE HAVE NOT YET MADE UP OUR MINDS ABOUT HIS
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REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE IN REBUILDING HIS ARMY AND WE
WOULD WANT TO HAVE BEGIN'S VIEW ON THIS.

8. BEGIN TOLD ME THAT DAYAN HAD BRIEFED HIM ON OUR
DISCUSSIONS ON THIS SUBJECT. ISRAEL, HE SAID, DOES
NOT OBJECT TO THE RECREATION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY PER
SE, BUT IT DOES NOT WANT A 3,000-5,000 MAN PALESTINIAN
FORCE TO BE ABLE TO OPERATE FREELY IN SOUTHERN LEBANON
AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS. NOTE: I HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY
RECEIVED FROM EVRON THE OFFICIAL GOI RESPONSE TO OUR
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ISRAELI ATTITUDE TOWARD U.S. MILITARY
ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. AM REPORTING THAT FAVORABLE
REPLY IN A LESS RESTRICTED MESSAGE.)

9. BEGIN WENT ON TO NOTE THAT THE CHRISTIANS WERE
NOW ASKING ISRAEL TO SAY OPENLY THAT IT WAS HELPING
THEM AND THAT IT WOULD NOT TOLERATE THEIR DESTRUCTION.
A YEAR AGO THEY WERE VERY WARY AND HAD WANTED THEIR
CONNECTION WITH ISRAEL TO BE KEPT SECRET. BUT OF
COURSE ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO BE CAREFUL HOW IT HANDLED
THIS MATTER. IT DOES NOT WANT TO PROVOKE ANY WAR
WITH SYRIAN, ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, IT WOULD DEFEND
ITSELF IF ATTACKED.

10. I CONCLUDED THIS PART OF THE CONVERSATION BY
SAYING THAT OUR DISCUSSION SEEMED TO ME TO UNDER-
SCORE THE DESIRABILITY OF A THOROUGH REVIEW OF
THE LEBANESE SITUATION DURING HIS VISIT. BEGIN
ASSURED ME THAT HE WOULD TAKE UP ALL THESE QUESTIONS
WITH THE PRESIDENT. LEWIS UNQTE VANCE

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